



Speech by

**Marc Rowell**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

Hansard Thursday, 21 October 2004

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## **TRANSPORT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2)**

**Mr ROWELL** (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (4.06 p.m.): I would like to make a contribution to this bill because it deals with some significant issues that I think are quite important. I will start with the issue of ammonium nitrate, because it is one of those ingredients that are necessary in the agricultural industry. Because of its nitrogen and ammonium content, ammonium nitrate has some very beneficial attributes in some aspects of agriculture, in particular for certain small crops. While I understand that this bill imposes certain requirements regarding the carrying of ammonium nitrate, in my experience it has been impossible to get it for the last five to six months. I am a bit surprised about what is happening. I know that some of the major manufacturers are not making it anymore and it cannot be bought from the regular outlets. It is one of those commodities that are needed in agriculture but it is almost impossible to get it at the present time. The last lot I was able to buy was about six months ago and it was only that the shed was being cleaned out that I was able to get it for use in a crop.

**Mr Lucas:** I don't think I'd like to have explosive lychees.

**Mr ROWELL:** I understand what the minister is saying, but it requires mixing with diesel before it actually becomes an explosive. To be quite frank, the prospects of that happening are slight. It has been on the market for years and years and I cannot recall any particular incident of significance. I know it has been used as an explosive. In fact, I used it myself ages ago. I cannot recall any particular incident where it was a problem. However, with the world that we live in these days and the prospect of there being people who want to cause havoc, it is an issue. I am not sure that we are going to stop it. It is a little bit like gun laws. We are not going to stop people who are absolutely determined to be a problem to society. If people want to get hold of the likes of ammonium nitrate, and there are sources around, I am not sure we will be able to stop them. Not much of it is needed for it to be very effective in a blasting operation.

I will talk briefly about rail. The minister will have some idea of what I am going to speak about, that is, the third party access in relation to National Pacific and what that means to the rail system in Queensland, in particular Q-Rail. In the past Q-Rail has been very useful for bringing crops and products down from north Queensland, and in the past we have had some very good services. There has been some good dialogue between the department and those of us up there. Today there is more going on with some of the departmental people. I can only hope that we get a good resolution to this situation. When there is this necessity to work with Queensland Rail to try to get a resolution to the issue we can only hope that commonsense will prevail. That is what I have pursued in terms of this particular issue.

It is so important to so many people in the region that we get access to that faster link that we have been able to use in the past. I am well aware of the amount of money that the government has spent on the rail system—it has been something like \$334 million, if my memory serves me correctly—to ensure we have a sound track system that is so critical to increase the number of actual loadings, the speed of trains and so on.

I was a little dumbfounded when we were faced with the problem of getting 7,000 tonnes of cucurbits out of Ingham. There were 21 containers at a time coming out and we had trouble linking them into a train that was designated to do that. One of problems we face in north Queensland is distance from markets.

With the decline in the sugarcane industry we have heard the government espousing that it would look at alternative crops to get around the problems we had. Many growers did that. They put the crops in and then found they had a difficulty with the rail system. I do not want to go on with this too much more. I hope that commonsense will prevail.

People are prepared to work together and the hierarchy of Queensland Rail is prepared to get on to the job and look at the difficulties being faced by those who are trying to get crops out of north Queensland. We are determined to keep as much as we can off the road. I think that should be one of the main priorities. We have to make sure that we do not snooker ourselves somehow with the determinations made about how we are to use the rail network. If we can get to a point where commonsense prevails we will get some good outcomes.

I will leave the issue at that point. We have issues with tilt trains and so on. But the whole point is that the rail system has great values and some real good prospects. I know there has been a determination within QR to improve the system. I believe to some extent that is happening. It is about coordination and how those people in charge go about determining how to move goods from one point to another.

When there are products that need to be speedily delivered and when there are products where temperatures are critical then we have to have a system that is expeditious and takes account of the crops involved. If we are going to put 7,000 tonnes of crops on the road—and that is only one small area—we will find that there will be many semitrailers being used. This will impact on road usage and on maintenance, particularly in the wet tropics. The cost of maintaining the roads and acquiring the necessary transport would be great. The government has a good system which it has spent a lot of money on so let us use it most expeditiously.